

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) takes its responsibility to work with Pacific Northwest tribes very seriously. BPA's Tribal Policy was written with extensive involvement from the 13 Columbia River Basin tribes, and signed in 1996. The policy is the foundation of BPA's trust responsibility as a federal agency and provides a framework for a government-to-government relationship with the federally recognized Columbia Basin tribes.

American Indian tribes maintain their inherent right to be recognized and act as sovereign nations. The United States has acknowledged this status through treaties, executive orders, Supreme Court decisions, laws and everyday transactions. As a federal trustee, it is BPA's responsibility to understand and support the tribes' cultural values and their statutory, regulatory, and treaty rights.

To ensure this support, BPA maintains a skilled Tribal Affairs staff. Tribal Affairs has developed the following mission statement:

*To ensure Bonneville Power Administration's understanding of and respect for tribal values and resources; Tribal Affairs will fulfill BPA's tribal trust responsibility and Tribal Policy commitments by initiating and supporting effective, two-way communication with tribal governments.*

## Services

Through its Tribal Affairs staff and business units, BPA is dedicated to providing the following services to the region's tribes.

- Develop and maintain strong government-to-government relationships and provide consultation and technical assistance to tribes.
- Proactively anticipate the tribes' need for information and be responsive to tribal requests for information on BPA initiatives, such as power products and services, utility formation, wholesale power rates, renewable resource development, transmission facility development, energy efficiency programs, and right-of-way policies.
- Provide information to tribes to help them understand BPA perspectives on power, transmission and environment, fish and wildlife issues being discussed in the region.
- Fully consider the interest of tribes when establishing BPA policies that impact them such as river operations, transmission system maintenance and development, environment, fish and wildlife programs and engage the affected tribes in two-way dialogue about potential policy and program changes.

## Programs

### Cultural resources

BPA's management of cultural resources takes place against the backdrop of BPA's relationships with the

52 sovereign tribal governments in the region. Protection of cultural resources such as burial sites, religious sites, and usual and accustomed gathering areas are of vital interest and importance to the tribes.

One challenge for the agency is that most of the transmission system was built prior to passage of many federal cultural resource mandates. BPA's transmission system encompasses a five-state service territory and includes over 15,000 miles of high-voltage transmission lines. BPA transmission line infrastructure improvement or maintenance projects can span many miles and pass through diverse terrain, sometimes including Native American cultural sites and historic areas. Annual river operations of the Federal Columbia River Power System at the 14-mainstem federal dams also impact federally protected historic properties and traditional cultural values on mainstem reservoirs located throughout the Columbia River Basin. BPA's Tribal Policy commits the agency to consulting with potentially affected tribes prior to taking actions that could have an adverse impact on them.

### Low-income weatherization

BPA has a long-standing commitment to provide funding for weatherization services to low-income households. In 1999, BPA specifically set aside funding to be targeted for Native American homes

to improve the installation of weatherization measures in both Indian Country and throughout the service territory of BPA's public utility customers.

Since 1999, BPA has met with several tribes who were interested in participating in the Tribal Set-Aside Low-Income Weatherization Program. As a result of these meetings, several improvements to the program were identified to ensure its success. BPA continues to work closely with tribal governments, local community action agencies, states and sometimes the servicing utility to eliminate any obstacles to the equal access to federal programs by the region's Native American population. Activities include:

- Direct involvement with tribal governments to implement outreach and coordinate with tribal members.
- Funding for installation of measures may be provided if the tribe has a qualified program that can implement auditing, installation and inspection services.
- Funding grants are simple and developed to meet the specific needs of the tribe.
- Funded tribal training sessions for certification as weatherization auditors and inspectors.
- Training for certified auditors and inspectors.

## BPA tribal student summer internships

BPA is offering four tribal student summer internships in 2006, two internships in Environment, Fish and Wildlife focused on tribal, fish, wildlife, and/or environmental areas and one each in BPA's transmission and power business units focused on engineering. These internships expose Native American college students to a stimulating and challenging set of professional experiences.

BPA has partnered with the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) to offer student internship opportunities this summer. Bringing tribal members into BPA's workforce will inherently improve communication and relationships with the tribes.

## Utility formation

The Energy Policy Act of 1992 paved the way for competition in the electric power industry. Tribes across the country now have an opportunity to redefine their traditional roles in receiving electric service and are considering forming utilities in response to wholesale deregulation of the electric industry. While challenges exist, there can be significant benefits for tribes who form utilities including providing and encouraging tribal employment,

supporting conservation and resource development, and improving utility infrastructure and service.

Owning and operating utilities allows tribes to work in their best interest and that of tribal members. A tribal utility can work for the sustainable development of the tribe through policies set and accepted by tribal members. Access to cost-based power from federal power marketing administrations in most cases will lower tribal members' utility bills. BPA requires that six Standards for Service be met before an entity can become a utility customer.

The purchaser must:

- Be legally formed in accordance with local, state, federal or tribal laws;
- Own a distribution system and be ready, willing and able to take power from BPA within a reasonable period of time;
- Have a general utility responsibility within the service area;
- Have the financial ability to pay BPA for the federal power it purchases;
- Have adequate utility operations and structure; and
- Be able to purchase power in wholesale amounts.

If you would like more information about these services or programs, e-mail [tribalaffairs@bpa.gov](mailto:tribalaffairs@bpa.gov), visit our Web site at [www.bpa.gov/corporate/About\\_BPA/tribes/](http://www.bpa.gov/corporate/About_BPA/tribes/) or contact a member of the Tribal Affairs team.

## Tribal Affairs team

The Tribal Affairs team includes the brightest and most talented staff from within BPA. The team works with federally recognized tribes in BPA's service territory. The team includes:

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# Tribal Affairs

